

THE

Christian Ambassage :

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, COBOURG, MARCH 9, 1870.
BEFORE THE RURI-DECANAL CHAPTER
OF NORTHUMBERLAND,

BY THE REV. VINCENT CLEMENTI, B.A.,
INCUMBENT OF NORTH DOURO.

"In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas."

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"We are Ambassadors for Christ."—2 COR. V. 20.
THE word "Ambassador" occurs only twice in the New-Testament, and in both passages it is used by St. Paul, whose Epistles are replete with metaphors.* In Eph. vi. 20, he speaks of himself as an "Ambassador in bonds," and in the text he alludes to all regularly ordained Ministers of the Gospel when he says, "We are Ambassadors for Christ."

In common parlance an Ambasssdor signifies a lay Minister, of the highest rank, commissioned by the Sovereign or Chief Magistrate of any country to act as his representative at the court of another Sovereign. The custom of employing Ambassadors or Envoys, the former as permanent Residents, the latter for the accomplishment of some special purpose, on some special occasion, is a very ancient custom.

Of the latter class were the "Messengers" sent by Moses "from Kadesh unto the king of Edom,"

* St. Paul's "metaphors are usually drawn, not from the operations and phenomena of the natural world, but from the activities and the outward manifestations of human life."—*Dr. John S. Howson.*

in the 40th year of the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness, to request permission to pass through his country, a request that was peremptorily refused.

Of the same class, too, were the "Servants" of King David, deputed by him to offer expressions of kindness and of comfort to Hanun on the death of his father Nahash, "the king of the Children of Ammon." And in proof of the high esteem in which such Representatives have always been held by the Sovereign by whom they are delegated, we read that when those "Servants" of David were ill-used by the Ammonites, their royal Master immediately took measures for vindicating his honour outraged in the persons of his Envoys, by waging war upon the aggressors.

Ambassadors were sent by Zedekiah to Egypt to treat for the supply of a contingent of cavalry to aid him in his futile endeavour to cast off the Babylonian yoke.

So, again, we read that Necho, king of Egypt, sent Ambassadors to Josiah, before the battle in which the latter met his death.

And, once more, the Almighty, by the mouth of his prophet Jeremiah, speaks of Himself as summoning His allies to battle against the Edomites, after the manner of earthly Potentates, by the instrumentality of an Ambassador,—a trans-

action referred to also by Obadiah in his "Vision."

These illustrations, selected from the Old Testament, are sufficient to prove that Ambassadors or Envoys were employed in the earlier ages of the world; and it might easily be shown, from "profane" history, that, as Malmsbury, in his Chronicle, asserts, the custom obtained amongst most ancient nations. Indeed De Wicquefort, who wrote a voluminous treatise on the science of diplomacy, entitled, "Memoirs concerning Ambassadors and public Functionaries," declares that "there is not any Kingdom or State that does not make use of them."

Herodotus, who was called by Cicero "the Father of History," informs us "that the Ionians and Æolians, who had refused to comply with the request of Cyrus, king of Persia, that they would revolt from Cræsus, the last king of Lydia, when they found he was sure to be their master, sent Ambassadors to ask to be admitted among his subjects."

Having thus invited your attention to the fact that the word Ambassador, or one of its synonyms, is of universal occurrence, both in sacred and profane history, and that the functions of that officer have been understood and recognized for a period exceeding 3000 years, I will endeavour briefly to explain the nature of the

duties he was, and is, expected to fulfil, and conclude with a practical application of the subject to ourselves.

An Ambassador, then, is defined to be "the representative of one Sovereign Power at the court of another." By the law of nations a refusal to receive an Ambassador by the Sovereign to whom he is accredited is a capital offence. And, when received, should he be ill-used, should his liberty be curtailed, or his life be endangered, the whole power of the nation, whose recognized representative he is, would be enlisted in his defence ; just as was recently the case with respect to the British Consul, although a functionary of rank far inferior to that of an Ambassador, in Abyssinia. Should, however, an Ambassador abuse his privileges or give legitimate grounds of affront he would be re-called ; should he be convicted of abetting treason against the Monarch near whose Court he is commissioned to reside, he would be deprived of all his immunities. Should war be declared between the Powers from whom, and to whom, respectively, he is sent, his functions cease and he returns to his own country. And, finally, his rank and his position are in some degree measured by the rank and the authority of the Sovereign to whom he personally owes allegiance.

An Ambassador, I said, is the representative

of a Sovereign and is accredited by that Sovereign. A few familiar illustrations will suffice in support of this definition.

When it pleased Jehovah to send a Messenger to king Pharaoh to demand the release of His suffering people, the Israelites, He selected Moses as His Ambassador :—His “God” he terms him, a word most forcibly indicative of his representative character. The credentials of Moses consisted not of any written authorization, but in the capacity to perform the most astounding miracles, commencing with the transmutation of his own and of Aaron’s rods into serpents,* passing on to the ten plagues, and terminating, as far as Pharaoh was concerned, in the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea and in the destruction of the pursuing Egyptians by the return of the whelming waves,—in testimony of the Almighty power of the Sovereign by whom he was sent, a power in the end acknowledged, however tardily, however reluctantly, by the earthly Egyptian Ruler.

So were the Judges, so were the Prophets—and here I may remark, by the way, that formerly, in England, even in the reign of Henry VIII.,

* “Although in the authorized version of the Scriptures, the rods of both Moses and Aaron are mentioned as having been changed into serpents, the words which are translated as serpents are different. The rod of Aaron, the priest, was turned into a *tannin*, i. e., crocodile, that of Moses, the Lawgiver, into a *nachash* or serpent.—Wood’s “*Bible Animals*.”

Ambassadors were styled "Orators"—so were the Judges and the Prophets, under the elder dispensation, God's Ambassadors, commissioned by Him, from time to time, as occasion required, to act as vehicles for the conveyance of His will, their credentials of such a nature as none could gainsay without guilt. Their message was sometimes conveyed in accents of tenderest love and mercy, sometimes in reproachful terms, and sometimes in thundering tones of warning and of threatening.

Again, Aaron was God's Ambassador, just as Paul and the other Apostles and their Successors, the Bishops of these days, and we, my reverend brethren, as delegated by them, are Christ's Ambassadors now. No one, possessed of even a superficial knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, can be ignorant of the fact that no sooner was Moses commissioned by Jehovah to act as the temporal leader of His people, than Aaron was selected, by His express command, to expound His law, and to preside at the offering of the sacrifices, and at the celebration of the services and the ceremonies of the Church in what is even now called "the wilderness of the wandering." What said Almighty God Himself to Moses? "Take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto Me

in the priest's office." And we find that subsequently the whole tribe of Levi was set apart for "the service of the Temple" as Ministers subordinate to Aaron. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him." And in testimony of Jehovah's will that the appointment of His Ambassadors should be vested solely in Himself, we read further that when Korah, a near relative of Moses and Aaron, and a Levite, usurped an authority and a power beyond what had been committed to him, he met a punishment so signal, so fearful as to act as a warning to others that none, even though members of the priestly tribe, might presume to officiate in a sphere beyond that attached to their ecclesiastic rank.

It would, however, be a needless trespass upon your time, on this occasion, were I to occupy a larger portion of it by additional references to the Old Testament dispensation now abrogated in favour of the more glorious dispensation under which it is our high privilege to live. My object in the foregoing illustrations has simply been to endeavour to draw your attention to the fact that the appointment of authorized officers, whether called, as in the text, "Ambassadors," or "Messengers," or, what is the same thing, "Angels," or "Judges," or "Prophets," or simply

"Servants," has obtained from the earliest ages, and that with regard to the Priesthood, some analogy subsists between those who officiated under the Jewish dispensation and those who now exercise their functions under the Christian.

The High Priest, and his subordinates, the Levites, were accredited by Jehovah himself, and, without their credentials, were as powerless to act as is any secular Ambassador at the present moment. What says St. Paul to the Hebrew Christians? "No man taketh"—no man has any right to take—"this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." So is it in the Anglican Church at the present time. We know that the first Bishops of the Christian Church, the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,—and the word Apostle means messenger or Ambassador,—did not fully enter upon the discharge of their Episcopal duties, until they were endued with the gifts and with the power of the Holy Ghost. Irenæus, who was born during the first quarter of the second century, declares that "it is unlawful to assert that the Apostles preached before they possessed 'perfect knowledge,' as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the Apostles." And Clement, generally supposed to have been a contemporary of St. Paul, writes to the same effect. So that not until they were

ordained to the priestly office by Christ, the great "Bishop of" our "souls," in the same manner as we, my reverend brethren, have been ordained by the Successors of those Apostles, and with the very same form of words, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," did He honour them with the commission, "Go ye and preach the Gospel to every creature," using an expression almost identical with that adopted by our Church in the "Form of Ordering of Priests," "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God."*

It would be foreign to my object on the present occasion to carry your attention onward to the various ecclesiastical Orders in our Church: it might easily be demonstrated that at the time of the Reformation in England there existed three distinct Orders—Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, and that to each of these Orders were allotted different degrees of rank and of authority, and different spheres of duty. I would rather, in conclusion, offer for your consideration the views I entertain of our privileges and our duties

* Archbishop Cranmer, on Rom. X. 13, 14, 15, remarks: "By the which words St. Paul doth evidently declare unto us two lessons.

The first is, that it is necessary to our salvation to have preachers and ministers of God's most holy Word to instruct us in the true faith and knowledge of God.

The second is, that preachers must not run to this high honour before they be called thereto, but they must be ordained and appointed to this office, and sent to us by God.

Again, the teachers, except they be called and sent, cannot fruitfully teach. For the seed of God's Word doth never bring forth fruit, unless the Lord of the harvest do give increase, and by His Holy Spirit do work with the sower. But God doth not work with the preacher whom he hath not sent."

as possessors of the high and honourable title accorded us by St. Paul in the text.

And first, as to our privileges : how many and how great they are ! “Ambassadors for Christ!” The Messengers of the King of kings to His subjects, i. e., to all the members of the Catholic Church “militant here on earth!” Our credentials, as Ministers of an important branch of that Church, are the “letters of orders” we receive from one of the Successors of the Apostles, together with special licenses accrediting us to the particular Congregations among whom we are appointed to officiate. When so accredited we may, with humble confidence, make use of the words of the text, and proclaim, from our respective pulpits, the message with which we are intrusted. And as that secular Ambassador who represents the most powerful of earth’s monarchs occupies a loftier and a more honourable, aye and a more responsible position than such as are delegated by inferior Powers, so we who are authorized to act and to speak for the “King of kings and Lord of lords,” for Him whose throne is heaven and who is metaphorically said to use this earth, beautiful as it really is and immense as are its boundaries according to our finite comprehension, simply as His “footstool,” may be deemed to hold a proud position indeed.

When Jehovah, in the olden time, thought fit to send an Ambassador to the powerful king of Egypt, in behalf of the Israelites, and selected Moses for that purpose, that favoured Leader had the privilege of witnessing a visible manifestation of the presence of God—of God in Christ* —so glorious although but partial, that he was constrained to “hide his face” from that blaze of unearthly light.

So again was Moses further privileged to hold direct communication with God, when, from the same mountain, though probably from a different portion of it, the Law was promulgated, that Law which was to be binding upon mankind even to the end of time. And when the Angelic Ambassadors—for, as Jeremy Taylor says, “He sends the Angels on embassies with His decrees”—caused their clarion-voices to be heard, heralding the approach of their Sovereign, and when the reiteration of the decalogue had been accomplished,—in testimony of the intercourse he had held with Him “who is invisible,” but who deigned to impart, on that occasion, a clouded manifestation of the “light ineffable,” that was an indication of His presence, the face of the human Ambassador “shone” with

* Stephen, Acts vii, 30, calls him “an angel of the Lord.” “Here, as continually in the Old Testament, the Angel bears the authority and presence of God Himself; which angel, since God *giveth not His glory to another*, must have been the *great Angel of the covenant*, “the Angel of His Presence,” Isaiah LXIII. 9,—“the Son of God.”—*Alford*.

so bright an effulgence that he was obliged to veil it from the sight of Aaron and of all the people.

No such manifestations, no such audible communications are now vouchsafed to the most highly favoured saints on earth ; but we enjoy what is of greater value, we enjoy the privileges of the Gospel Dispensation. That Dispensation, prefigured in the Old Testament, is fully revealed to us in the New. We enjoy the felt though unseen Presence of our great Prophet, Priest, and King, assured to us by His own most gracious words, "Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world." We enjoy the influences of the Holy Spirit, influences pledged to us in various portions of the Sacred Scriptures. "The earnest expectation of the Spirit," is said to be "given in our hearts." It is promised that "he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." We are declared to be "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise," and we are, therefore, warned not to "grieve the Holy Spirit." And it is asserted that, if we are saved, we are saved, not by any righteous works of our own, but "by the working of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost ;" on which assertion, among others, our Church founds the doctrine, contained in her Baptismal Service, that, at the Font, upon the utterance of the form

of words prescribed by our blessed Saviour, accompanied by the threefold aspersion of water, and followed by the marking of the symbol of our faith upon the forehead, the influences of the Holy Spirit are infused into the infant, and grace imparted, sufficient to enable it to lead a holy and a godly life; unless that Spirit, "grieved" by the subsequent pollution of the "temple" in which He has taken up His abode, leaves it—sometimes only for a season—sometimes, it is to be feared, sometimes to return no more.

So, then, Christ's Ambassadors in these latter times, no less than the Ambassadors of Jehovah during the Mosaic Dispensation, are accredited by their Sovereign, and are under His special protection. What under these circumstances, is our duty? and how is that duty to be performed?

Our duty is, obviously, to become the exponents, to the utmost of our knowledge and of our ability, of our Sovereign's will. And how can we become acquainted with that will? From His own written Word and from what can be clearly deduced from it.

It is to be lamented that there is, in the present day, an indication of a desire on the part of some of the more enthusiastic members of our Communion to exalt what they call the teach-

ing of the Church above the teaching of the Bible : the two should be, and really are, identical. To say nothing about the positive contravention of the law of the land, as proved in the cases of some of the "Representative Men" of what is known as the "ultra Ritualistic Party," a contravention condemned in Holy Scripture, wherein we are commanded "to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates," "to be subject unto the higher powers : for the powers that be are ordained of God," with the accompanying declaration that "whosoever resisteth the" temporal "power, resisteth the ordinance of God," and with the threat that "they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation," or rather, as the original word implies, "judgment," in testimony that if such breakers of the law of man shall, by any chance, evade the power of the earthly magistrate, they shall by no means escape the arm, as they have not escaped the eye, of God,—to say nothing further respecting such breaches of the law, I maintain that our duty, as Christ's Ambassadors, is, plainly, to lay before the Congregations committed to our charge, first of all the doctrines of the Bible, and then to prove, as we may prove, that the teaching of our Church, in her Articles and in her Formularies, is in strict accordance with, is, in fact, founded upon, those doctrines.

And in doing this, we should study not to be actuated by the feelings of the fiery partisan, who, because he has joined a particular party in the Church—and, unhappily, we cannot close our eyes to the melancholy fact that parties do exist in our Communion, that we are as “a house divided against itself,” and we can scarcely avoid identifying ourselves, or being identified, with one or other of these parties—thinks it necessary to advocate the peculiar tenets of that party, well nigh to the exclusion of “the weightier matters” of the ever-blessed Gospel. There are, unhappily, such men to be found, men who appear to be endeavouring to approach as closely as possible to the doctrine and the discipline of the apostate Church of Rome, without actually joining her Communion.

Like some self-dependent Alpine traveller who, venturing too near the verge of the giddy precipice, finds, suddenly, the crumbling edge sliding beneath his feet, and dashed headlong down the mountain's side, lies a mangled corpse, upon the unapproachable rocks beneath.

Or, like some adventurous yachtsman who, hugging a dangerous coast too closely, while rounding a rugged headland, is seized by an unknown current or attacked by a sudden squall and wrecked among the foaming breakers.

Equally rash, equally dangerous, is the course

pursued by the men of whom I speak, a course tending to "shipwreck" "concerning faith" either in their own case or in the case of others. They are endeavouring to contract the volume of the Rubicon that separates, ecclesiastically, England from Rome, till it shall become a rill so narrow that our children may, in very sport, leap over it, to find themselves landed, on the opposite shore, among nets and springes and other entanglements, from which, haply, there may be no escape.

Not that, in saying this, I would have it understood that I desire to see the legitimate ceremonial of our Church pared down to the standard of Puritanic meagreness : far from it. The Pauline aspiration is my own, that "all things" may "be done decently and in order." But as long as the Church of Rome is actively antagonistic to our own, I, for one, am prepared to hoist my colours to the mast-head of our own true Anglican Ship, and to show, unmistakably, to the world at large, to what Communion I profess allegiance.

But yet, again, we should never cease to bear in mind that, as in politics so in religion, our brethren are no more bound to agree with us in opinion than we are bound to agree with them. As says St. Paul, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? to his own master he standeth or falleth." Let us "judge this rather

that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." "Let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." We should, therefore, "speak" what we believe to be "the truth in love," and, where we deem others mistaken, endeavour, in all humility, to point out to them what we conceive to be their error, whether of doctrine or of discipline, and by fair argument and by an appeal to the "Standard of Truth,"* try to draw them over to our side, not by means of iron chains of rancour, but "with cords of a man," i. e. "with bands of love."

Oh! for a voice like the voice that spoke of yere on Galilæ^a's sea, and calmed the wild and stormy elements, a voice of love and of authority combined, a voice that might even now avail to stem the rushing tide of pseudo-Romanism on the one hand, and of scepticism on the other!—for there are types of either evil in our Church at the present moment, engendered, perhaps, of a too great devotion to æsthetics in the one case and to mathematical precision in the other: appeals, respectively, to the senses and to the understanding, as if those senses were incapable of leading us astray, as if that understanding were infallible. And here I may take the opportunity to observe that I believe one of the

* "The whole foundation of what the priests (Roman Catholic) inculcate is not the authority of the inspired revelation of God, but the authority of the Church—they 'teach for doctrines the commandments of men.'"—*Bishop Wilson*.

objects of the convocation of the so-called (Ecumenical Council in Rome was to endeavour to counteract the evil influence of Rationalism ; and an admirable object, too, were it carried out irrespective of the dogma of the infallibility of the head of the Roman Church. That Church does not believe that human reason should be "left to itself, without any restraint, and independent of the divine authority of the head of the Church." We can, we do, make use of the very same words : but by the "Head of the Church" we understand Christ Jesus, while they mean the Bishop of Rome.—"Sirs," I say, that powerful voice might reprovngly exclaim, "Sirs, ye are brethren ; why do ye wrong one to another ? Ye have one common object, the furtherance of the ultimate salvation of the souls committed to your charge : ye have to remind your Congregations of the fall of man, of man's restoration through the sacrifice of Christ, and of the influences of the Holy Spirit : ye have in short, to lay before them "all the counsel of God" as contained in His Holy Word. Yes, brethren, our ambition should rival that entertained by the blessed martyr, William Tyndale, who declared, "If it please God to preserve my life I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scriptures than the Pope." There are, confessedly, many things in that Book, "hard to be understood." Those whose

duty it is to expound it should, therefore, study it, not only as it appears in the "vulgar tongue," but in the language in which it was originally written ; so that they may not be placed in the mortifying position of the celebrated Mathematician who, when questioned by the African savage, was unable to unfold its meaning. And when we find, as we must find, mysteries beyond our comprehension, we should be content to bear in mind that it was not the intention of the Almighty that we should fully understand everything we find written therein, but that there must be scope for the exercise of that Faith, "the evidence of things not seen," by which alone we can hope finally to attain to the glorious revelation of His entire will, when we shall "see Him as He is." And oh—

———"Dread Searcher of the hearts,
 Thou who didst seal by Thy descending Dove
 Thy servant's choice, O help us in *our* parts,
 Else helpless found, to *learn* and *teach* Thy love."

